

Into the Abyss: Casualties of War

by Jin Won

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Summary: A unit's view of war and how they survive...

1. PART ONE: The 210th

"In war, truth is the first casualty"

****PART ONE****: _The 210th

>

>"There is no way to peace; peace is the way." <p>

****1825 HOURS 21-AUGUST-2549 (MILITARY CALENDAR)**

>210th INFANTRY BATTALION, ALPHA COMPANY

He couldn't remember a mission like this; hell he couldn't remember when a single campaign had committed over twenty thousand men and women to a single engagement. To him this was something new, something never seen before.

The Covenant didn't try to glass the planet, they avoided that with all costs, and instead they just dropped in thousands of soldiers into the city itself and ran like hell out of the system.

A new tactic?

So being part of the first platoon of the 210th Para-Infantry Battalion, Company A wasn't something he would enjoy since they were always the first ones in and the lasts to leave. That just gave them more of chance to die during the covenant's suicide assaults or if the flyboys lost in space a good bombardment would ruin their livesâ€¦ for good.

Corporal Nicholas A. Harding still didn't say a word; he sat quietly on the bench closest to the drop ship's door with the rest of first squad. He heard a voice break the COM silence in their helmets and the crackle of static filled his ears. "Okay ladies, I know how much you like to live so listen up! You are?"

No reply.

"Good."

"The Covenant have set up positions to the South and Western parts of the city, they have massed an assault to destroy the 14th ODS Brigade and 702nd Infantry Battalion. We are not going there."

As he expected it a voice spoke up. "Why's that? I wanted to kick some covie ass!" There was a roar of laughter and the Corporal broke a smile.

The voice wasn't amused. "McKenzie, you smart ass, I thought you had to shoot straight to kill something. Plus you have to be at least taller than a grunt to kick their ass, or they'll return the favor."

The Pelican roared with the sound of the enlightened.

The red head from Brooklyn, New York back on earth nodded and smiled, but kept his mouth shut.

"Well since he shut up, let me continue. We are not going to the reinforcement points, that is Bravo and Delta Companies job, our mission is to drop into the MEDEVAC point and guard the docs so they can do their job. There have been a lot of banshees in the area and they have been targeting the hospitals so they've moved the patients to an underground garage.

"There are three points of entry and there will be a platoon watching each entrance, except half of first platoon- Lieutenant Bale you listening?"

A crisp. "Sir yes, sir!"

"Half of your platoon will be on patrol, I don't care who, but you'll be talking a couple of hogs that the Pelican drops off and you'll be going north to HALMARK 3, you got me? It's marked on your map."

"The rest of the battalion shouldn't have a problem, but if they do, they'll call us up. Semper Fi. Carry on."

The ship was filled back with the low talk of the Marines as they spoke about their mission. Harding relaxed in his seat, his fluttered and began to close. Then nothing but darkness and silence, just the way he wanted.

His eyes fluttered open to the sound of the men stirring, he stretched and blinked a few times, and you never dropped in tired and wished that he didn't fall asleep. But he didn't get any rest for the past few days so he needed it.

The COM voice in his ears returned and it was commanding as ever. "Marines, wake it up. We're over the drop zone and these birds need to get back to the ship for supplies so ready your chutes and get ready to go feet first into hell."

"Sir yes sir!"

The Corporal made it to his feet, his parachute on his back, his ear ready and his MA5B locked and loaded. The only problem is that he was too tired to think, he didn't want to think. The Marine kept rubbing his green eyes.

The doors slowly began to open, exposing the space outside, the dull blue sky that was slowly turning orange and reds; he could see darkness in the distance.

There was a constant roar of the machinery helping the door opened. "Breakin' stuff!"

He spun to look behind and a smile spread upon his lips. "Lookin' tough!"

Behind him was Corporal Shane O. Poles, a dark skinned man with short cut hair and pitch black eyes. He had a boyish looks, which seemed to never fade with a smile but he could age years if something was wrong. He was part of his squad, third squad, a rifleman.

"Well this is FUBAR!"

The roar of the wind made his voice distant, and Harding couldn't keep his eyes off the light near the drop bay that pulsed yellow. Just waitâ€¦ But for how long?

"How that's Hound?"

The black man nodded. "The Covenant started their assault twelve minutes ago and our guys are peeling like an orange. Now our mission's changed, we got to get the docs out of the city."

Thousands of questions flooded Nicholas mind, but one came up. "How?"

"The Pelicans are going to evac the majority of troops, and since we're the only ones at full strength our company is going to drop in and take out as many bastards as we can but we got to get the docs out first and get the docs to the mines outside of town."

"Hey Hound, how the hell do you know all this?"

Poles smiled a large grin from ear to ear. "Well, you don't transfer from ONI to the Marines if you don't pick up a few things."

Hacking into the COM lines again, the man had skill and he made it unnoticeable. He wasn't one to keep the information to himself; most likely the whole company knew and was pissed. Yet only the 2nd Infantry Division's 210th Para-Infantry Battalion could do the job.

The yellow light began to pulse green and the all too familiar voice spoke. "Go! Go! Go! I'll see you on the ground Marines!"

They went by pairs, the Pelican went in a wide circle, making sure to place them evenly, or if too many were massed in one area, they would be easier to kill. But if not enough the covenant would get to them.

Poles and Harding were in the middle, Poles cradled his M90 Shotgun while Harding grasped his MA5B Assault Rifle. It wasn't long before it was their turn. The LT was by the drop ship's door, he was a lanky man, dark brown eyes and sandy color hair, and he had a solemn expression upon his face.

He nodded at the pair. "I'll see you on the ground gentlemen, rally point Zulu-24." Yet in the beginning, Harding could have sworn that the LT said HALMARK. Something wasn't right but tried not to let it bother him. During a drop, you didn't get nervous.

"Go! Go! Go!"

Poles stepped out into the great abyss and Harding reluctantly followed after.

The sky seemed like a blur as they descended.

2. PART TWO: Angels In Green

PART TWO: _Angels in Green_

"_Epitoma Rei Militaris_"

1900 HOURS// ENROUTE TO RALLY POINT ZULU (JERICHO II)

CORPORAL N. HARDING-CORPORAL S. POLES// ALPHA C.

Air rushed past his face, the goggles stopping his eyes from watering and the helmet didn't fly off because of the leather straps keeping them there and the only thing that blocked the wind resistance was a gray mask around his nose and mouth.

His eye fell upon the city and from where he was looking, was hell.

Smoking cinders, flames licking the sky above, and he could hear the _pop pop pop_ of gun fire from over three thousand feet up. That wasn't a problem, but him hearing it right below him in the relative area that was going to be a problem.

His eyes averted to his left where he saw Hound floating forty feet away, the man stared back and gave a thumbs up. Harding nodded and returned the gesture.

A couple hundred feet below him a white puff flared and there was the first chute opening. The next one came up a few seconds after.

He didn't see it coming', hell he didn't expect it. Neither did Hound by the looks of it and when the first plasma bombs came through the air deploying his chute was the last thing he was thinking about and a wave of sadness fell upon him as he saw that two men below would be sitting ducks.

He couldn't be more right, the blobs were a light blue surrounded by a ring of indigo and timed perfectly. There were two, the first flew past the men and continued upward. The second one seemed to arc with the pair, slowly falling back to the earth with them.

The first one detonated. The explosion from the plasma wiped out the parachutes' of the marines, slowly the strengthened fiber cloth began to burn away as the bits of plasma burned through it.

Covenant flakâ€|

The second plasma ball was the finishing move, it detonated and by what Harding could see it tore one of paratroopers in half and the other was thrown to the side, leaving him with a melting chute and over five thousand feet to go.

The marine opened a private COM channel to Hound. "Peel off; the bastards are using some new weaponry. Peel out and we'll see each other on the ground."

"Got it." A thumb's up. "See ya later Cowboy."

The man banked away from his partner and set off towards a pristine river that ran through the middle of the city, it winded towards the outskirts of town.

On his arm was an altimeter; he glanced at it, the red numbers scrolled to three thousand feet. He was going to go to do a low opening and hopefully he wasn't a target. The numbers continued to scroll down, and what he didn't want happened.

Two bluish blobs floated from below towards him, they lazily floated through the sky towards him.

Harding dove forward, increasing speed, but at the same time pulled his arm right, as steering, and his body dove like a one hundred and fifteen pound rock carrying one hundred pounds of gear.

He flashed past the blobs and breathed a sigh of relief, his breath exhaling from his lungs. His eyes closed and opened, looking down at the war zone.

The air left his lungs, and his eyes grew wide.

Hundreds of them, blue blobs of plasma floating towards him. He breathed one word that described it all.

"FUBARâ€|"

He had to think fast, there was too little time to do maneuvered and another sudden drop like that he wouldn't be able to deploy his chute. He was screwed.

_The main deploys at what? Three thousand feet minimum butâ€|" _A smile came upon his features as he pulled the ripcord, a strong yank and he was pulled upward. The plasma aimed right at him.

He had to time it; the first row of plasma angled upward and the second began their curve downward towards the planet. The interception point, he continued to float down ward slowly and steadily.

Boom.

It sounded like a thousand freight trains exploding at once, each one

in anger and it showered the sky with bright light blue lights and the blobs of plasma began to spread outward. The ones below began to throb purple.

Time to go.

He jabbed a finger on the main release button and the world seemed to spin and twirl. He plummeted towards the earth; he flashed through the second plasma orbs and continued downward, they exploded with a bright fashion.

He glanced down at the altimeter. _One thousand five hundred feet_, he was well below the reserve chute deploy point and to get to the point: He didn't have a prayer.

But he wasn't going to die hitting the ground; he yanked the second cord, the reserve chute blossoming open, first the cloth then the strings. It unfurled and he was wrenched up.

The altimeter numbers slowed. One thousand feet.

He was still coming in too fast; he needed to lose some weight, but what?

Harding grabbed his from his belt, unsheathed it and began cutting the line between himself and the back below him. His hands moved in a forward and back motion until the rope snapped. The chute went up a few more feet and everything moved slower.

The military issue pack faded when it began to match the cement below. Nine hundred feet to go

He didn't see any more blobs of plasma, and he didn't see any signs of the covenant. Yet. His head swiveled. Nothing but smoke, and the incoming darkness of night.

Harding glanced back at the ground and it continued to rush up to meet him like an old friend.

The landing could've been more pleasant but he didn't break anything. He crouched with MA5B with the reserve chute still on his back. With one hand he reached up and rubbed it through his red hair while the second was still on the trigger.

"Hound do you read?"

Static.

"Hound I'm in deep. The Covenant has this area. Are you alive or dead? If you're alive just answer."

Static.

"_God damn it all_"

A burst of static hit his ear.

"Damn. God. Yeah I'm here Cowboy." A groan in the background. "I'm messed up man, the plasma. I'm off course. Way off course."

"Where?"

There were sounds of MA5B barking the background. "Shit. They found me."

"Where are you?"

"Cowboy, get to the rally point and the Docs. I'm surrounded," Static, and more, the ratta-tat-tat, of a MA5B and then nothing but silence, and Cowboy there alone in the middle without a soldier or a soul to turn to.

Shane "Hellhound" Poles was in a boatload of trouble, ever since he stepped out of the Pelican he had a bad feeling about the whole op. When the covie flak started coming in by the hundreds he had the misfortune to not be able to dump his main chute and switch to his reserve since he never packed a reserve.

So the maneuvered he saw Cowboy make was useless to him. So when the first of the shots passed over his head, he did the only thing he could, he ditched his chute over one thousand feet up into the freezing cold waters of the river below.

How he survived was in itself a miracle.

Hound dragged himself on shore, gear and all and walked just over a half a klick until he came upon what he would call the covenant army itself baring down on him.

Grunts, Jackals, Elites, the whole shebang came down right on top of his head, and they brought their gear with them. Wraiths, ghosts, shades, and even banshees what he could see weaving through the buildings above.

Hound was able to get in a manhole, close it above him-even though it didn't fully cover him, and he was able to move freely. Until five minutes ago when Cowboy radioed in, they must've caught the burst transmission and they went to his position instantly.

They sent grunts, must've thought it was a civilian, so he was moving through the sewers underneath a major city while being pursued by a legion of grunts and one elite. Or two. It didn't matter; he couldn't fight an elite with one MA5B with half a mag anyway.

Hound slogged through the foot deep muck, his MA5B braced on his shoulder, its light blaring forward into the din, his foot searched forward making sure the footing was good and continued on.

Ahead he saw there was no way for him to continue forward, it was either a left or a right.

"Manâ€¦ This stinksâ€¦" A grumble of almost inaudible words came from his lips and he moved on. The scenery wasn't much to look out, green streaks stained the walls, the water was oily stained an orange-brown. And the whole passage was less than two meters high causing him to crane his head so he could move freely.

_Search for the human- _Wort_. I want him alive._

He knew what it was, Elite speak and it was up ahead around the next corner. He glanced up at his helmet, "Damn translator's busted."

The human killed the light on the muzzle on his weapon, and slowly commenced forward, he pressed his back on the cold pipe, inching forward.

He heard odd barks and growls but the translator whispered in his ears. We will find the humanâ€¦ The static, he doubted the machine would work again. It was through but at least he knew they were after a human, what human? Him? Noâ€¦ He knew a legion of grunts were scouring the sewers looking for something but was it him?

He glanced around the bend, the air rushed from his lungs and his eyes widened.

There were six grunts, each armed with a plasma pistol, their backs turned to him, surrounding a white light that lit the small section of the tunnel, another one facing him was a gold armored elite. The elite's bluish-white plasma blade in his grasp, its human-like eyes searching as he continued to speak in its alien tongue.

The grunts seemingly leapt up and down. The commanding was over, and the gold elite began to bog it's way to the left, followed by two black armored grunts, the other four were dressed in red and orange armor, the two began moving forward in the tunnel in front of him, one went to the right, grumbling in odd barks, and the last came his direction, it's desiccated blue skin and it's shiny blue armor proved it was not suited to this type of combat.

Alone the creatures were weak, and the meter high alien wouldn't stand a chance.

Hound slung his rifle over his shoulder, and withdrew his combat knife from his sheathe, he held it down in a stabbing motion, and didn't peak around the corner again. He listened the creature move, seeing the ripples grown larger and larger as it came forward. The splashing sound of it stumbling forward.

He saw the muzzle of it, then its masked head, and then he saw the large breathing tank. It didn't look from the left to the right; he pounced on it, slamming it to the adjacent wall, it squealed in pain, its plasma pistol dropping into the cold water.

His right hand shot up and began to yank on the mask; he heard the gasping sound of the non-breathing grunt, his left hand slammed into the grunts throat. He felt the florescent blue liquid sputter on his hand, yet he swiped his hand to the left, giving the grunt an extra smile.

It made no other sound, and collapsed into the water with a splash.

His eyes looked down at his battle dress uniform, it was stained a light almost glowing blue, he went down and felt through the water to grab the plasma pistol. He checked it over; turning it over in his hands before placing it in his now slimmed down pack.

He looked down at the grunt body; the water was beginning to tinge blue as well. The patrols would most likely come back; he had to get

out of the sewers and back to the surface.

Hound gave a glance in the direction he came and the direction the grunt came before moving off to the left, where the grunt was going to go, hopefully he wouldn't run into goldilocks and/or his four grunts.

"Human."

He spun his eyes grew wide, the gold elite stood there it's eyes narrowed into slits. Around him were his four grunts.

Spoke too soonâ€¦

The great beast had it's weapon leveled at his chest, a metallic looking plasma rifle, the grunts had their pistols aimed straight at him as well. He wouldn't be able to kill the creature, the shields would hold and then the elite would get a few shots off killing him.

He didn't have a prayer.

"C'mon split chin you want a piece of this? Come and get it." The elite gave a cock of it's head to the side, and it's two bottom mandibles spread wide. An alien smile.

The beast dropped it's rifle into the water and stood straight, the elite tapped something on it's wrist and the constant hum of the shield generator fade. "You will die with human."

"I don't intend to, ugly."

The elite gave a valiant roar of might and charged. A thought flashed through his mind. "What the fuck was I thinking?"

The first blow threw him to the wall, a sickening _whap_, and he felt his whole body became a house of pain. His hand touched his lips and blood was flowing freely from more than a busted lip.

"Is that all you got, squid?" A grimy cough escaped his throat, with that pain shot through his body like lightning, and it felt ten times worse. "If you just stand there all day, I should take a picture. Give it to all your friends, but hey-" _Cough "-_But they're just as ugly."

The elite could be seen agitated by the insults, a pathetic human insulting him _and _his brothers! The primate will pay! The look on the elite's face said it all.

This time, the elite didn't charge, it _walked _forward and looked down at him, Poles was braced against the slick sewer wall, and he could feel the cold bumps against his back and a rough, dry hand wrap around his neck, lifting him out of the water and towards the ceiling.

The elite withdrew from it's belt a hilt, for what he didn't know. From all the combat he saw, he had never fought a commander face to face, and anything could be expected.

He heard a kshhhâ€¦ A blue-white blade came up from the hilt; it had

two blades, one coming from each end, each curved and came straight, forming two points.

The world seemed to black out, and everything began to fade, slowly. The mandibles of the elite spread once more. "Any last words, human?"

Poles had thought about many times, what would his last words be? Right now, after thinking for a quick few seconds he decided death wasn't an option.

He reached for his holster, strange he remembered the pistol, a M6D, after all that time.

Hound's hands thumbing the release strap and his fingers wrapped around the cold metal. The safety was already off since the jump, he never kept it on.

His hand raised, and he smiled using the last ounces of breath from within him he spoke. "Yeahâ€¦" The pistol was leveled at the neck of the beast. "Smile for the camera."

The pistol discharged, and again, and again and again. The first round impacted the neck; it tore through the soft blue tissue, went through his wind pipe, and exited the other end, taking most of the upper spine with it and some gore as well. The rounds after did the same.

Goldie, fell to the ground, dropping Hound to the floor, and the water. He groaned, and saw the grunts, their eyes full of terror. His voice was a mere gasp. "Wanna piece of this?"

Hell, they didn't know what he said, but they ran anyway.

****2055 HOURS//NORTHERN CITY (EXACT LOCATION****

****UNKNOWN) ENROUTE TO RALLY POINT ZULU****

Over two hours he had been wandering through the city, darkness had fallen and the multiple fires that had consumed everything in the past few hours lighted everything with a dim glow of crimson-orange. He kept his weapon raised, always.

Two hoursâ€¦ Where the hell was he, he had made it to the banks of the river and had been traveling along it, hoping he would see Hound or some other marine, all he did meet was six marines, KIA, all in various stages of dismemberment, courtesy of the Covenant.

He saw what looked like a sewer pipe ahead â€"hell a tunnel, water flowed freely from it. His boots slid along the sand as he made his way to it. There was a pack floating the water, and he wanted to see if there was any ammo in it.

His reached the shore, his body knelt beside it, and he slowly began to open it. Then he felt it, a searing pain going through his side, his body flew into the surf. He felt the blows come down upon him, slowly he felt the breath leave him and water began to fill his lungs.

Yet he yelled. "C'mon ya covie bastard!" And he felt the blows slow,

and then stop. His body was yanked up, and he decided that whatever was gonna kill him. Most likely a grunt was going to pop him in the head, but no grunt was strong enough to lift him and if it was an elite he would have been dead by now.

"Son of a bitchâ€¦ Cowboy?"

It sounded like Hound, noâ€¦ Hound was dead. He coughed up the water he had swallowed and his eyes finally opened, they were looking down at his collar where two hands were grabbing him, brown hands. His eyes moved up the arm, the sleeves of the person's was tinged a light blue. His eyes kept moving up, he saw the armor of a UNSC marine, and he went up to the scrawny neck and the face.

The Marine would remember the face for years to come, he saw the glasses, the shaved skull, the wide nose and the soot covered face and he broke out in a smile. "Hound, you fuckin' idiot, you almost killed meâ€¦ I thought you were dead."

"So did Iâ€¦" Hound smiled and released his friends collar, the water was ankle deep so Harding perched himself with elbows instead of falling back first into the surf. "What's happening?"

Hound shrugged and stood, he grabbed his pack from the water. "C'mon, the rally point should be a couple clicks from here; we should make it there in a couple hours." The man seemed different, but he didn't notice it until the man pulled him up from the water and he saw in the man's eyes was blankness. A stare that had no focus.

He didn't say anything about it but looked into the tunnel from which the man came, it was pitch black, and he could see nothing beyond. What happened in there?

2205 HOURS// RALLY POINT ZULU

DATA CORRUPTED-//- ERROR

They were met by a pair of sentries, one manned a Warthog's Light Anti-Aircraft Gun, the LAAG, and they were both privates and were part of Delta Company from the 210th. Where the hell was the ODS'T's, well the hell was 702nd? It was like they never existedâ€¦

He asked the cap wearing private who had a pug nose and green eyes, Hound stood next to him cradling his MA5B. "Wear the hell is the ODS'T's? Hell, where's the 702nd?"

"We were supposed to reinforce them sir, but when we landed there was nothing."

"What do you mean nothing?"

The man shrugged. "Nothing, we found no evidence of any soldiers protecting the city, just a bunch of civilians who have taken up arms."

"Where's their leader?"

The sentry pointed up the debris filled road. "Down there sir, you should see a tent ahead with red cross, medical tent. He's a doctor sir; he saved a couple of buddies of mine. You should get

along."

Nicholas nodded. "Thank you Private."

The Sentry nodded. "We'll see you later Corporal." The sentry's eyes focused back on the road from where they came.

When they moved from the sentry's position, and civilians instantly amassed them, he had never seen so many in a combat zone. The crowded around them, and they must've saw he had never been in the encampment in the first place. They were mostly women and some children.

An old woman looked at them, she wore torn clothing, and her eyes begged for some forgiveness, as if he was to blame, but they changed to a look of bare happiness. "Angelo nel verde. Benedicali, angelo. Angelo nel verde" | "

"So what she say Cowboy?"

He smiled, "My Italian isn't that good, but I think she said, 'bless you angels in green.' Or something like that."

Hound didn't return it. "Angels in green, eh" | I wish I could say the same thing." He continued forward without a word. He wished he wasn't there at the moment and time. Angels in Green. Hell if they were angels they would be winning the war.

3. PART THREE: Not alone in the Universe" |

****PART THREE****- "We're not alone in the universe" | "

"A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.""

****2255 HOURS// RALLY POINT ZULU****

****DATA CORRUPTED-//- SPNH// SHUTDOWN****

The tent wasn't hard to find since it was there, civilians surrounded it like a moth to the flame. Harding could tell they were refugees from the parts of the city, most were wounded, each dripping with blood. He looked out Hound. "See what you can do."

Hound in ONI had taken medical courses, he knew more about anatomy, human and covenant. So he was best suited for the work. He didn't object but nodded.

"Gotcha." He gave a thumb up. There were hundreds of them, and he rolled up his sleeves on his shirt. It was going to be a long night, but at least he still had a lot of light to see by, those fires made it as bright as noonday.

Cowboy managed to find a path through the crowds, and got to the tent itself, first he didn't want to go in. The moan and groans of the wounded inside caused him to hesitate

But it was better than staying there with all the civilians, so he went in.

The smell of burnt flesh, the horrid stench of death filled his nose and he turned around but halted. He needed the situation report and he needed right there and then. His eyes opened and he looked around. Lined to the left and right were rows of crimson stained beds, some with bodies others without. The ones with bodies had a hell a lot of medical equipment around them.

The floor was wet, he fear to glance down on fear what it was wet with.

He noticed small holes were on the top of the tent, covenant flak explosions to close. Burned straight through the fabric.

There were docs; some wore marine green others wore white, from the city hospital. Nick stopped by the first bed, another Alpha Company marine, Sergeant Lance Updike he was asleep or dead. He hoped it was the initial. The man was the heart of second platoon; he kept them entertained, trained the new recruits, and was a down right good soldier. Seeing him their, his bald skull, his dark skin soaked and wet with sweat his body just limp he wasn't the same.

"The best of the corps" He murmured and continued. He saw a few Privates from his outfit in the beds, but not much, most came from Bravo, Charlie and Delta.

His feet stopped at one of the docs. "Hey doc, I'm looking for-

"Over there." He pointed a man who sat alone at a table, in his hand was an old fashioned MA2B, he wore cameo shorts, and Nick instantly noticed he was missing one leg; it was replaced by an artificial.

The man was aged, his hair was snow white, and wore round rimmed glasses, and he had a small goatee under his chin. He noticed on his shoulders, he saw that he held the ranks of Colonel.

Stopping a mere two feet away, he saluted in a firm straight voice. "Sir, Colonel Nicholas Harding, requesting permission to speak to you sir!"

The man removed the cigarette from his mouth; his blue eyes gazed up at him. "Permission granted. Pull up a crate, Marine."

"Thank you sir."

The man snuffed a laugh, "Don't mention it, marine."

Nick grabbed a small crate, and perched on it. His first question was blunt and to the point. "Sir, what the hell happened here?"

"Son, I'm retired. Cut the 'sir' bullshit. Anyway, he placed the cigarette back into his mouth. "What happened here? You really want to know? Let me 'plain it to ya, at 0850 Hours this morning, the transport craft Joan of Arc, spotted a craft outside the perimeter our system, and reported it in.

"Next, the Joan starts to the scout the area and is blown to bits. Right off the bat, our drones see it and instantly reports to High COM on REACH that the Covenant have arrived in the system. Next thing

you know, a bunch alien freaks come descending down on our head. Now, we are one of the last Outer-Colony planets in controlled space, and we still haven't gotten one super MAC gun in orbit, so we already know that the UNSC don't give a damn."

The man inhaled. "So we made a military outfit, to counter anything that was thrown our way, in this case the Covenant. They invade and we tried to repulse them, we did, for a time, a lot of men died too. Including my two sonsâ€¦"

"So I told my little company of fifty men to fall back and hopefully some UNSC guys show up, and you did."

The Corporal shrugged. "So where the ODST unit?"

"The what?" He had a confused face.

"The ODST, the 14th? What about the 715th?" Harding explained. "They were supposed to be here and ready to hold off the Covenant. They were stationed on this planet."

The ex-Colonel frowned. "Son, no unit was stationed has ever been stationed on this planet. You really think they are going to put men on a UNSC unit after over twenty years of war they can't even give us a MAC?"

"So no one was here?"

"No one but us and the Covenant."

Corporal Harding leaned back, "Do you have contact with Fleet COM?"

"No but we do have contact with your Frigate."

Harding nodded. "Show me."

The man sharply stood, and nodded. "Follow me." The Colonel shakily stood; his feet ambled toward the rear tent flap. "My men, even how inexperienced they are, have held back the Covenant for a day, with some old weaponry from our armory, and household items."

"Household items?"

"Molotov Cocktails." The man looked back and smiled, "When your Pelicans dropped in some supplies we gathered what we could before the lines fell. Three M12 "Warthog" LRV's. Two M66A1 Mongoose All Terrain Vehiclesâ€¦ No tanks and we needed one. The crates held some rockets, and launchers."

"Anything else?"

"No." The ex-colonel shrugged.

Corporal Harding asked. "So what have your men been fighting with?"

"Like I said old stuff from our armoryâ€¦"

Harding pushed on with the questions. "What's your armory?"

The Doc glanced back. "Wellâ€¦ A couple of outdated weapons from our little armory."

"How outdated?" Harding questioned.

"M1Bs, from 2400s, a couple of other weapons from much later. A couple of replicas from the museum, 1941 M1 Garands, anything we could get our hands on."

"You must be kidding meâ€¦ So that's what your men are armed with?"

"You got it Corporal."

"Damn it allâ€¦" His eyes focused at the sky, the haziness bothered him a bit but he focused off it. He had other things to worry about.

"Here we are."

Harding stopped, and looked down. There were no more civilians; there was another Warthog and two people manning it. They didn't wear uniforms, and he knew they were militia men. "Lark, Rivera." The pair turned and looked at the marine, they both eyed him and their faces began to light up.

One jumped down from manning the LAAG, while the other with a rocket launcher moved forward, and gave a glance behind them. "Who's this guy with you Ben?"

Cowboy realized he never even asked the Colonel his name.

"Well this is Corporal Harding of the 210th Para-Infantry Battalion. They've been taking some hits for us."

When they came out of the shadows of the building and into the flame light, provided by a burning car near by, he saw they were both women. The one who was on the LAAG was a stunning woman, shoulder length hair, vibrant blue eyes and the smile she wore was astonishing, set in perfectly white teeth.

The other was much shorter, stout and heavy set, sporting black hair and deep brown eyes with a pug nose. They both wore camouflage uniforms without the armor how they survived a daylong battle with the covenant he could only guess.

"Harding this is Cathy C. Lark," The Colonel motioned to the heavy set woman, "And this is Crystal Rivera, both of the most dedicated militia personal you will ever see."

Harding nodded, "You've both have a first hand account of the combat situation, what can you say?"

Lark spoke first. "Well," She had a country drawl. "The Covenant have good support, and they're rationing their troops. They have tanks, the little flying things, infantry support vehicles."

Wraiths, banshees, and ghosts, her description would do.

Corporal Harding nodded, "Did you find anything coming down that road?"

"No, sir." Rivera spoke up. "Nothing, we saw a couple of grunts, they looked like scouts. We knocked them down before they could make a fuss. Other than that nothing."

Harding nodded. "They found what they were looking for. And they aren't going to pursue us."

"So you haven't seen covie since the attack?"

"You hit the nail right on the head, if they're out there "which I bet they are- they're lying low and I mean real low. To tell you the truth I don't think they came to kill us humans" Lark looked over her shoulder and frowned. "I just wished I knew what they were doin'."

Harding looked at the MA5B. "Well Ms. Lark, I think you may get a chance to find out."

* * *

>Poles finished wrapping the wound and smiled at the woman who nodded in approval and moved off. That was the last of the civilian casualties, and he had been working for just about an hour, ever since Cowboy left him to fend for himself with the orders to help the civilians.<p><p>

He shrugged and looked down at the remains of his med kit, nothing. Scraps of combat dressing, the bio-foam injector was empty and the painkillers he had dished out like candy. What remained was little more than absolute zero.

"Hey marine."

His eyes glanced up, expecting to see a man holding something or other in pain, instead he met eyes with a man dressed in a white t-shirt, and brown looser fitting slacks, his eyes were pale and he seemed to be weakened by the onslaught of the covenant.

"What do you need? If it's for medical treatment," He glanced him up and down and instantly decided he didn't like him. "Well" then you're shit out of luck."

The man face turned into a sneer. "Sorry to bust your bubble but I'm just fine, but we have something of use but we don't know how to get it work."

"What is it?"

"A interplanetary radio."

4. PART FOUR: First Contact

PART FOUR: "First Contact"

"The bonds of loyalty can tie one to the grave."

****2300 HOURS// RALLY POINT ZULU ******
> **DATA CORRUPTED-//- SPNH// SHUTDOWN**

Nicholas Harding looked at them, and laid out his plan as short and simple as possible. "We know this, they are protecting something. That is clear enough for all to see but the problem is we don't know what, and how many are between us and them."

His feet moved through the rubble, the trio surrounded him. The three got a pair to be sentries as they moved back to the main "compound".

"So we do this covertlyâ€¦ The sewer way in this city is extensive, so we should be able to get into their lines without a problemâ€¦" His voice trailed off as he remembered what Poles had told him about the sewer system, he mentioned it was crawling with grunts but other than that he didn't mention anything else. Harding gave an invisible shrug, grunts shouldn't be a problem.

He shouldered his MA5B, and Young spoke, her eyes looking straight into his. "Soâ€¦ What do you expect us to do? We can't just walk in and expect us to run and gun. There is nothing standing between us and over a couple thousand of them. I am not about to lose more men to those things for your mission Mr. Harding."

A hardened look came upon him and he growled. "I have lost more friends in this damn war than I can imagine, and if what their hiding can stop this conflict than by god I will let every single person on this planet die if I can get that to it."

They all stopped, and froze, Harding's outburst wasn't logical and he even knew and wished he could've taken it back.

Young growled. "Well, Mr. Harding than you will have to do this without the use of my men because I will not let you get them killed."

Lark looked at him as well and frowned. "Corporal, you're nuts."

The ex-Colonel glared at him but didn't say a word.

Harding was wrong, and sighed. "Look, I know you've seen your friends and family die and you don't want any more of them to but this could be the final chance to do something, I was deployed on this planet without any knowledge, my unit is most likely dead, my friend is on the brink of insanity," And he knew Poles was getting there, it could be seen in his eyes. "And Iâ€¦ I have nothing left to die for except for this purpose to stop the Covenant from finding Earth. That's all I can do."

Their looks of anger faded, but still lingered.

"Corporal, you are the first soldier I've seen who actually had the balls to say something like that. But I cannot let you sacrifice my men and women for something that could end up being nothing." The ex-Colonel said, his face creased into a scowl. "I want you, to get contact with your ship and I want evacuation of this planet. I don't have authority but you do, and if you can do that, I will let you have some of my men to go on this wild goose chase."

Harding nodded; looked at the others their faces were in disbelief.

"Ben are you fucking insane?" Lark shouted, Young had a look of shock and awe, with a hint of rage.

He ignored them and continued. "Get your buddy that you mentioned and meet me in front of the command tent in a five hours, get some rest while your at it, you need it. Lark you're coming with me, Young, go with the young man and give him anything he needs. That's an order."

The Colonel gave a final nod and moved in the opposite direction to a building men and women were milled around, Lark followed giving a harsh glare at Harding, and Young paused looking at them leave.

Harding frowned and watched them leave as well; he turned and moved to the last known position of Poles with the woman next to him. There was eerie quiet that he didn't like so he spoke.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Young."

Her voice was a quiver, and pain lased it.

"So am Iâ€|"

The makeshift command center was quiet, the ten men and women inside of it hovered over the lone marine who tinkered with the computer and his eyes intent and focused. He frowned silently to himself, and looked up. "Where did you find this?"

The man who came to get him was named Lucas G. Ivy, the "Sergeant" of the command center.

He replied without hesitating. "Wellâ€| We found it about two kilometers north from where, which is now in Covie territory. A dead marine." His voice blunt and cold. Poles held in a grimace.

The way he spoke about his colleague irritated him and hopefully he didn't have to deal the man for much longer. Civiliansâ€| They cared nothing for the man fighting and were the first to criticize.

"I seeâ€|" His voice trailed off. "Did you recover the body or the tags?"

"No."

Poles didn't reply, as he looked through the exposed service panel he used his free hand to open the service panel and grab the two pieces of wire which seemed to be causing the problem. They were torn and the copper could be seen.

He nodded reached in with both hands and connected the two wires back slowly, making sure not to damage anymore the key components. He smiled, that was done.

"I thinkâ€|" He said. "I fixed it."

He reached up and grabbed the receiver, it was pretty basic

considering everything of standards of their year, it took much from the old radios from World War 2, did have some things to amp up the range of it and keep it much more reliable.

He grabbed onto the transceiver and spoke calmly into it. "This is Hellhound zero-zero-two-oneâ€¦ I repeat this is Hellhound zero-zero-two-one, does anyone read me? Over?"

The cluster that stood behind him waited quietly, listening intently.

"Damn itâ€¦" Poles whispered silently to himself. "This is Hellhound zero-zero-two one, does any one read me over?" It was a broad wave code, could be picked up on any frequency so he should've been hearing a reply.

"P-lesâ€¦ That-ou?" The voice crackled over the COM, and Shane's eyes brightened. There was pause, more static, before he heard a voice again a few seconds later; it was trying to narrow his frequency down.

"Poles! It's good to hear from you again, Corporal."

"Damn straight. It's been awhile."

_Ain't that the truth? _

"Lookâ€¦ I am ordering packet zero-one-five, O-N-Iâ€¦ I want program Gamma-21. Am I clear?"

"I understand." The AI's voice that was full of cheer was completely neutral. "What are the casualties?"

"Ninety five percent. I need, crafts for evacuation of all civilians on this planet. Reroute everything, am I clear. We need units at my current position. Narrow down on my transmission. Send in the Package Delta Zero One Zero."

The AI voice hesitated. "I hear you Corporal. Pelicans in bound, I hope you know what you're doing." The COM snapped off, silence.

"So do Iâ€¦"

****2305 HOURS// UNSC FRIGATE "JOHN F. KENNEDY"****

****GEOSYNCHRONOUS ORBIT AROUND PLANET****

His name was Captain Vince Polk, and stood at a stiff attention and the bridge crew looked on in utter silence as the ship's AI, Orion, toga and all appeared on the hollow pad. "Sirâ€¦ I have received word from the men on the surface. The 210th."

The Naval Officer's blue eyes brightened up. "What did they say?"

"The Package sir. Delta Zero One Zero."

The naval officer slumped back into his command chair. "Jesusâ€¦ What was the number designation?"

"Zero One Zeroâ€¦ Sir."

"Twenty-four hoursâ€¦ Are you sure?"

"Sir my programming doesn't allow me to lie."

The Polk nodded silently to himself, his eyes staring into the void.
"Okay. Put the countdown up and hope that the 210th can pull off something amazing."

2310 HOURS// 210TH BRAVO "BEARS" COMPANY//

DOCKS W/ CIVILIAN SURVIVORS

The first of them, the amazing "Bear" Bravo Company of the 210th Para-Infantry Battalion were KIA, when they dropped into the war zone but the rest had made it out with relative ease. They landed, counted up the casualties, which resulted in fourteen killed, seven wounded and several others missing, presumed dead. Those were low compared to other drops that the battalion had done in months before.

"Sir we caught a broad wave message to the Kennedyâ€¦ It was Corporal Poles. Most of the Battalion is dead sirâ€¦ And the rest are running around with their heads cut off. He called for the Package."

The Captain of the Company, a heavy set man with devilish eyes and a mop of red hair disliked Alpha Company, and mainly first platoon since in the beginning of the formation of the battalion that Platoon had defeated his Company's best and brightest. "He called for the Package?"

"Yes, sir."

"Time?"

"I would sayâ€¦ Around forty eight hours by the designationâ€¦ We narrowed in on their transmission. Do you want us to try and contact the rest of the Battalion and rally there?"

"Damn straight I do, get the 'hogs, up and running let's get goingâ€¦ I don't want to be left behind on this rock."

"What is Gamma-21 and Delta Zero One Zero?" The militiaman more confused than anything else.

"Fail safe protocol. Don't worry about it, just tell me, is there anyway for you to get into contact with the other militia men around the city?"

"Wellâ€¦ Yes, now that we have a radio." The man spoke with a tone of uneasiness.

"Good. Now I want you to get them on the COM and get them here, tell them to drop whatever they're doing, if they have civilians, tell them to get them here. Right now."

"Why?"

"Because in forty-eight hours this whole city is going to be a bloody smoking crater with the charred bones of ten thousand

covenant. I'm and telling you to move, don't make me tell you again."

The man nodded, and Pole's eyes shifted to Ivy who stood there silently, they stared at each other, they both knew their missions would conflict in the near future, and the outcome would be something neither wanted.

Harding came into view in front of the tent flap; the Corporal stopped and looked inside. Next to him was a stunning woman, which Poles paused for a split second before standing. "Cowboy. Glad to see you're still around."

"What you expect me to run away into the night."

"Of course." Poles gave a smile, and nodded at the woman who gave a soft smile and nodded back. He held out a hand, his gaze shifting to hers. "Corporal Shane Poles. Friends call me Hound."

She accepted the grasp and gave a half smile. "Jennifer Young." She then added. "I'll wait outside." She vanished outside the tent flap and into the darkness.

"Where were you?" Poles sat back down and used an arm to motion for Harding to do the same.

"Meeting with their leader." Nicholas replied coolly, sitting down silently across from him. "She's there leader?"

"Noâ€¦ She's more of a 'Lieutenant.'"

"Oh."

"Anything else, Hound?"

Poles gave a look Harding had only seen a few times, once when Poles found out his home was glassed and the other when he found out his mother died an evacuation ship from that planet. "Yes. We have a problem."

5. PART FIVE: Abandoned

PART FIVE- "Abandoned"

"_Lead, follow or get out of the way._"

SP/NH 0010 HOURS// RALLY POINT ZULU

DATA CORRUPTED-DATA CORRUPTED- SHUT DOWN

Shane told Nick of everything, explained what happened when he was gone with the group, Nick didn't doubt him. Sure, of course he was aggravated that Poles went behind his back and called in the strike without him but he couldn't blame him. He did what was right, what he knew what they needed to do.

"_But, hell? Twenty-four hours?_"

That wasn't enough time to scratch the dirt of their boots, much less

evacuate a bunch of civilians from the area and to another city. He knew that the evacuated the city prior still there was still hundreds, maybe thousands within its walls.

Damnâ€¦ Harding murmured silently looking at his helmet camera, it was blacking out, and beginning it's shut down. He frowned and removed it, and set it down on the table. "Our gear is going to hell."

He had noticed that Poles had long since removed his headgear; he just stared at Nick waiting for him to continue. "Okay, here's what we're going to do, we're going to get patrols back. You said the Pelicans were coming correct?"

Poles nodded.

"Good. Get the civilians into one spot and then when the Pelicans land we're going to land, get them out of here, then you me, Colonel Benjamin and Jennifer and whoever wants to go will infiltrate Covenant lines and see what they're after."

"Nick you're _crazy_." Poles had never criticized his friend's plans; no matter how insane they were but this one was new. "Are you insane? See what the Covenant is after? There is nothing to find. They invaded killed a bunch of our friends on the drop and are just waiting for backup. We don't need to see what they're after. The Longswords can handle that."

"They're going to blast this place to oblivion," Harding didn't miss a beat. "We need to find out why they surrounded the area around a frickin' museum. And are not trying to kill us at this very moment because I know they have enough ordinances to send a whole squadron of Banshees to plasma our butts to hell and back again." He jabs a finger at Poles as he sharply stood up. "You've been with me since the beginning of this outfit, of the famed 210th. Now Shane I am _asking _you for your help. Are you with me, or against me?"

Poles leaned back in his seat; his eyes gazed up at Harding who looked down at him demanding an answer.

His mouth opened to speak, his mouth creased into a frown and he said a few simple words.

"No. You're on your own."

**0015 HOURS// 210TH BRAVO "BEARS" COMPANY//ENROUTE **

TO RALLY POINT ZULU W/ CIVILIAN SURVIVORS

Bloody hellâ€¦ The package? Must be fucking nuts to call in that thing, that earlyâ€¦ That was insane._ The Captain frowned, and shouldered his MA5B, glancing over his shoulder at the men in the column behind him, continuing on back was the Civilians who were protected by a platoon of more paratroopers.

Everything was quiet, no one spoke, and they were going to avoid the center of the city that was where the most of the plasma flak came from when they were dropping in. So they kept to the outskirts.

And the rally point was in the outskirts so that wouldn't be a

problem and they were getting clo- it was quiet almost like a whisper in the dark. Then in the distance the pulsing bluish-purple lights. There were fifteen _pairs_ of them.

They mad little sound as they approached, and the Captain squinted. His eyes widened when he realized what they were. "Rocket squads, front and center."

The order echoed back and it wasn't long before the two squads of six marines each were there, three rockets for each squad and two charges per rocket so they had a total of twelve rockets in total. That was more than enough. "Target the sights and prepare to fire."

They lined up in single file, aiming.

"Pick your targets and fire at will," These rockets were not the best, they were obsolete, no locking on, no heat tracker so when the volley sounded and the rockets streaked towards their target they automatically knew they were going to miss, but they didn't know they would miss that much.

Seven rockets missed, streaked past their intended targets and exploded in mid air a few dozen meters after missing. Then four more hit two of the same targets, so only one actually hit a banshee causing it to spin out of control and impact the ground in a blaze of fire. The rest just came into range as the soldiers began their reload.

"Look out!" The volley of plasma, superheated searing plasma streaked toward the marines, they all ran to avoid them, two banshees fired their fuel rod gun, and radiation bathed the group of rocketeers.

The Captain dove to the right avoiding the heat, and the death that was behind him as he stood up, gripping the gravel like ground and pushed himself up. "First platoon get up here and give some covering fire on those banshees, second platoon I want the civilians to the rally point ASAP. And third go with 'em."

There were acknowledgements and the men all turned towards their intended targets, third and second platoon jogged back while first which had lost the most men since the beginning to the trek moved forward and all had their MA5Bs unleashing hell upon their foe.

"Captain! What about you?" The company's XO "executive officer-asked as he reloaded his magazine, slapping in a fresh one and began giving controlled bursts at the shadows that looped in the sky strafing them with their mounted plasma cannons.

He didn't answer, still wondered how and why weren't they dead yet, they of course were suppose to be, being strafed by a hell load of banshees was suppose to kill you in the first run not keep you there.

_Unlessâ€| _

"First platoon, to the rally point now!" As if on queue for a holo-movie, grunts, hundreds of them streamed out of the alleys and the streets ahead. Their elite commanders followed them; most of them

blue armored unleashing their rounds upon the UNSC soldiers.

"Target the split-chins! Kill them!" Someone shouted over the hell, rubble was all over; men were tripping, including some grunts that stumbled and fell to the ground with high pitched yelps, The Captain moved to the right, his hands getting sweaty and his image blurred as the MA5B continued to hit grunt after grunt which got in his tunnel vision.

He continued to fall back, shouting orders into the COM system. "Get those wounded men out of there." Or, "Grenades hit the bastards with grenades."

The Captain stumbled and hit the ground on his rear, embarrassing for most but he ignored it, getting up and turned his back to the enemy. The plasma shot was the first thing that hit him, right between the shoulder blades on his right side.

He fell on his face, a red liquid trickling from his nose, and a gash spewing more from his head. He dragged himself forward along the rubble. He continued, even if it was a hopeless effort that his mind continued to tell him to keep him going.

The blue armored elite had been in combat for a few days on this pathetic human world, his eyes were focused on the human who was immobile on the ground. His hand reached for the plasma sword magnetically attached to his armor. He took it up and ignited it.

The skirmish â€"it was drawing to a close.

The blade's steady hum filled the Captain's ears. And one final thought came to his mind: Am I going to die alone? A question that was in all minds that fell that day.

He knew the end was near.

The elite, in its blue armor, its pale cold eyes, held up his hand a half a foot, and it fell, quickly, silently.

Captain John Charleston Miller screamed a high-pitched scream that etched itself into the minds that would hear it.

For the men of Bravo Company it was the last thing they had heard from their captain.

****UNSC FRIGATE: JOHN F. KENNEDY ENGAGING ****

****CVS FRIGATE, ORBIT- JERICO VII****

"Fire all archer missiles, give me a firing solution so when the archer missiles hit the MAC round will hit as well." The voice was very stern and very worried, something rare in his voice.

Orion small holographic display nodded, and he spoke. "But sir without power from the reactor it may not be accurate enough."

The covenant had hit the reactor a few hours before, destroying everything and everyone there, why weren't they atomic bits? It was â€"for the first time- past him. The covenant destroyer launched a

salvo of plasma aimed at the front of the frigate, they had evacuated the ship only them and a group of defense marines remained, the pelicans were sent a while ago.

The captain closed his eyes and waited, as two dulled thumps resonated through the hull, followed by white streaks. This could be called his finest hour. If it was his last.

6. PART SIX: Freedom's Doorstep

****PART SIX**: Freedom's Doorstep**

"_If patience is worth anything, it must endure to the end of time."_

****SP/NH, DATE UNKNOWN/ TIME ****

****UNKNOWN-- DATA CORRUPTED****

Poles frowned silently, moving outside, he left Harding inside, the man had grown quiet when he left, the sky looked like it was tinting to a lighter shade of dark blue, and dawn was coming. Jesus it would be good to see daylight again but it would bring nothing but show destruction and maybe the dead. Then they could expect maybe a grunt attack coming at them from, damn it, which direction were the Covenant?

He shrugged, it didn't matter, and they were on their way out of there anyway, so they didn't need this issue at this moment.

"Contact! Lots of contact!" A voice screamed from one of the buildings, "They're coming from the east! Down main street!"

Poles un-slung his rifle from his shoulder, he checked his magazine, half a magazine. Thirty rounds give or take. The indicator on his rifle was cracked, thus displayed nothing. Mechanical pieces of junk.

Shane shouted over the din, over the screams of civilians. "To Main Street! Everyone with a damn gun to Main Street."

Militia ran right by him, their old fashioned weapons, rocket launches, MA5Bs, M1 Garand, and Tommy Guns, anything they could find ran forward. Their weapons raised, he followed after. Poles could see Ms. Young going into the same tent where Harding was. She stopped and looked around after she exited, saw Poles and jogged over to him.

"Where's Nick?"

He didn't quite hear her. "What?"

"Where's Nick?" She yelled. The screams of the refugees were getting louder with each passing second.

"Don't know. And he's not important now, we have hostiles coming down the main road, the patrols are coming back but we need every single man and woman who can handle weapon on the line. Make sure nothing

get's through."

She nodded. Yet she didn't have a weapon. Poles flipped open his holster and pulled out his pistol. "Can you handle one of these?"

"M6D, high explosive round with times five sight," Young replied, checking the magazine and flipped off the safety. "I've handled one."

Poles smiled, and pointed towards the line, "C'mon."

She jogged forward with him close behind.

Bravo Company's organization went scattered like leaves into the wind. The whole group ran, first lieutenant Peter Ludwig, had lost his rifle, his pistol and his helmet during the middle of the frantic run to catch up with the refugees and second platoon. He was part of first, he was the platoon leader of first and he left his men behind. He left his Captain behind, he was now a coward.

And everyone knew it.

"They're coming! Run!" A marine shouted from behind him, who then kicked up the speed and passed him, he was without most of his armor, just a green shirt where the armor was suppose to cover, the soldier wore no helmet, had no weapon except a pistol in his holster and he continued to run. Bolting forward.

Poles saw the stream of people, and yelled. "Hold your fire, they're refugees! Hold you fi- Look at the sky! Take those banshees down! Take them out!"

There was at least a dozen of them flying in a tattered formation, losing their cohesion somewhere between them wanting to kill the human beings and them doing strafing runs at the refugees. "Fire! Damn it! Take 'em out!"

The militia had made a line a few dozen meters up the road from the command center, destroyed vehicles, rubble and slabs of metal from the cargo crates where they got most of their rockets.

The whole line opened up, six dozen militia, a few other marines, and a few civilians fired, their weapons opened up and the banshees hit a wall of lead, and high explosives. Poles didn't know which came first, the explosions or the stream of refugees that slammed into them, but he knew the latter hurt like hell.

The refugees streamed up and over defensive wall, pushing the men and woman down, trampling them in their masses. The marines, they came next, many in various states of hysteria pored over. Some continued to follow the refugees but others hit the line, did a quick about face and shouldered their weapons.

Peter Ludwig wasn't one of them, he kept on running, following the refugees, not about to stop, until he was either dead or he was clipped in the face.

The hit came fast, a clip with the butt of ones rifle to the forehead, his head snapped back, and stars filled his eye sight and a

whimper escaped his lips.

He heard someone comment, "Damn coward." Then the sound of crunching of rubble upon the ground before they ran to the front.

The remaining refugees trickled through the line and the militia and marines reorganized their faces hardening to the attack that was going to come. Poles reached with the back of his hand and wiped the sweat from his brow. "See anything?"

It was getting foggy, and the dust and smoke in the atmosphere was heavy. Breathing was becoming harder every second.

Jennifer looked at him, her pistol still in her hand. Her knuckles were white as she grasped it. "No!" She responded quietly. A tremble was in her voice.

"First time in combat?"

She gave a nod her eyes refocusing on his.

"First rule of combat, look where the enemies coming from, you don't want to be surprised by anything. That's the last thing we need." The looked down the road. "And remember, they're coming to you, thus just aim and fire, don't worry, don't freeze up. Just make sure you hit the target ahead."

Another nod.

"Good. And one more rule."

"What's that?"

"Stay with me and you'll get out of this alive. Trust me."

A voice yelled over the din. "Holly hell! Here they come!"

And they were coming, the odd barks and growls, and the cold yells of the elites filled the night air. Poles looked down the road, his helmet, unlike Nick's still worked to an extent, it couldn't tell the date nor the time but he could still filter out the grime in the air from the targets. He squinted and on command the optical viewer switched to heat scanner, night vision would do him no good there.

It was a bloody wall coming at them.

Grunts. He could tell them from their light blue color on his heat scanner and the elites they held body heat, they were the crimsons spread evenly between the white their heads searching the buildings to the left and to the right for no ambushes.

It would have been a bloody smart plan too. He thought_. Put a fire team in every one of those buildings they would have a clear range of fire, and the damn grunts would be ripped to shreds._

He should've thought of it sooner.

"Okay, ladies and gentlemen, we're out numbered and most likely out gunned!" He shouted over his short range radio to the men, he could

hear his voice echoing in the ears of the soldiers close by. "From what I can see their bunched up pretty tight so when I give the cue I want rockets and grenades in the middle of them. But on my mark!"

He wanted to make that clear, he wanted them to have the maximum effective use, and he knew they only had a limited few since only marines would have them. And that would make it what, six grenades for each marine and a total, he glanced to his left and to his right, a couple dozen grenades, it would be good enough but it would not be enough for this attack.

At least they had rockets.

Poles spoke into his COM system again. "People, I know most of you never fought a battle, most of you are both replacements, want to be heroes or protectors of your people, and most of you think if you retreat that the Covenant will kill you anywayâ€¦ You're right. There is nothing to retreat to if we fall back now, the Covenant owns this city and this is the only real estate we have." Jennifer gave a glance at him.

"The Covenant has kicked humanities asses for the past twenty years, and most likely they'll kick our asses for another ten more. But today, this is when we will forestall their advancement. Behind us there is no other marine battalion, no more soldiers, there are our friends, our loved ones, our familiesâ€¦ Our people."

He inhaled. "That's who you're fighting for, for them."

Jennifer looked at him and nodded. "That was one hell of a speech."

"Well you could say that was pulled out of thin air." The soldier flicked off his safety, he glanced at Jennifer. The conversation was cut short.

"They're a hundred yards away!" Someone yelled, there must've been markers or something out there because a guess like that was one hell a guess.

"Hold! No one fire!"

"What you're waiting to see the whites of their eyes -if they have whites?"

"Just wait."

Another shout from the opposite side of the line. "Seventy five yards!"

"Goddamnit! Hold!"

Poles felt sweat trickling down the side of his head, he ignored the feeling and sighed. "Remember," He looked at Ms. Young. "Keep low, and don't stop firing that weapon."

"But I only have one magazine, and that's in the pistol."

Reaching down into his belt he pulled out two more pistol magazines and handed them to her. "Make 'em count."

She took them and stuffed them into her pocket.

"Fifty yards!"

"Ready!" He heard rounds being fed into chambers, safeties being switched off. A group sigh was heard, tension was trying to be released.

"Marines, prime your grenades!" There was second moment, "Throw 'em!"

The a dozen fragmentation grenades flew threw the year, tapping down on the ground in front of the horde. The horde didn't pay attention to them, they continued forward, and the only thing that stopped them was the detonation.

The explosion shuttered the Covenant line, grunts flew their the air, elites were thrown to the ground, the whole line seemed to stall for a complete second. "Everyone fire! Take them out! Kill 'em! Kill 'em all!"

The line errupted with gun fire, the lead wall slammed into the elites, purple blood sputtered out their bodies, the grunts light blue blood sputtered out. They collasped, the other bodies were in a complete line but they kept continuing.

Ping. Ping. Ping.

The M1 Garands were out of ammo thus they had to reload, that was about half of the militia right there, costing them precious seconds. The Thompsons went next, running out, another two to three seconds without constant fire, the MA5Bs and maybe M90 Shotguns were still going, because of the pump of the Shotgun and the sixty round magazine of assault the rifle.

Poles sighted the first grunt, thumbd the safety, aimed, and slowly pulled back on the trigger. The burst was focused and complete, the grunt stuttered back, three wholes in it's chest as it fell. With that he sighed the next grunt, aimed and then fired.

The militia rocket teams without the order, began to fire, rounds streaked through the air, the middle of the formation, parts of grunt and elites were tossed into the air, rubble rained in their lines.

Poles shouted over the COM, the air was thick with smoke and dust. "Hold your fire! Cease firing!"

It withered out, died slowly. And silence was heard.

Poles primed his own grenade, and stood, Young looked up at him. She hissed at him. "Get down!"

He held a finger up to lips, and into the mist. The grenade flew through the air and stopped in the middle of the fog.

It detonated.

The limited light it showed that there was nothing there, he spoke

into the COM again. "Roof teams, you see anything?"

A reply came back fast. "Nothing sir, just bodies, lot and lots of bodies."

"Anyone else see anything?" Poles was asking anyone in general.

There were "No's" to "Hell No", and that made him feel a bit relieved. Poles loaded a new magazine into his rifle. And moved over the line, Young reached out and grabbed his arm. "Where are you going?"

"If there's someting out there I'm going to find it."

The marine activated his flashlight and disappeared into the fog, Young glanced at the soldiers around her, all unsure if to follow. "Screw this." And with that the woman climbed over the rubble and chased Poles into the abyss.

Poles continued to press his weapon against his shoulder, hopefully he didn't encounter any real resistance out there, hell, he hoped everything in there was dead. Yet somehow he doubted that.

The Corporal stopped, his eyes gazing around the mist, at his feet was a couple of grunts, dead from rounds that ripped them to shreds. He prodded one with his foot, no motion.

_Good. _

He pressed the COM mike to his lips. "I want some marines out here."

Multiple replies filled his ears but all said yes. He glanced to his rear and saw a dozen muzzle flashlights come on and make their way closer.

Poles continued through the dead, no movement, something which he was quite happy of.

"Found anything?" The voice caused him to jump a meter off the ground and he spun fast, his MA5B ready to level the voice into nothing. Behind him stood Ms. Young with her pistol tucked into her cargo pants, she gave a half-smile.

"Calm down, there's nothing left but dead and dying Covenant. Nothing more." And she was right, he heard bursts from other marines rifles as they continued through the dead, policing weapons and grenades.

"Yeah, rightâ€¦" He murmured.

"Contact! We have contact here!" A Marine screamed over the COM channel, Poles spun, there was nothing but darkness and the fog.

"All units converge on that man's position!" Poles looked back at Young. "Get back to the line, make sure your militia men pop anything that isn't human."

She nodded and stormed back to their lines, Poles waited she disappeared before he charged deeper into the mist.

The lights hit him first.

Bright and unending, then the hot blast of air that knocked him down, his head impacting a large concrete piece of rubble. The words of the Covenant began to shout unending words, they didn't sound Covenant however, they sounded almostâ€¦ Human.

His head swirled as he reached over and prepared to grab his rifle but it wasn't there.

Unarmed and a hostile right next to him, he wished that he had his pistol.

He closed his eyes, the heat faded as the flyer, or whatever it was that flew over him in a roar.

The voice filled his ears once more. "This is Major Frederick Packard of the 10th Transport Squadron, any one out there?"

Covenant willing to use human translations, and that blast of heatâ€¦ That was no Covenant craft, it was a damn Pelican.

The Evacuation team had finally arrived.

He murmured loudly. "It's enough to make you old."

Shane felt someone helping him up, yanking him to his feet. "Let's hope so, Mr. Poles."

Nicholas Harding stood above him, a smile on his face.

"You changed your mind?" Poles asked.

"Me? No. I'm still going but I wanted to make sure I see my best friend off."

The soldier led the man back to the line. The massive hull of a Pelican loomed in front of them, the nose of the craft facing them. The pair climbed over the rubble and went around the ship. There was marines crowded around the rear of the craft their weapons holstered or slung over their shoulder.

Pushing through them, Poles and Harding came upon a man who had his helmet tucked under his arm and a sad smile on his face, beads of sweat poured down it. In his black flight suit, he sported a red beard and mustache and green eyes, he smiled silently.

"Someone need a lift?"

7. PART SEVEN: Deus Ex Machina

PART SEVEN: _Deus Ex Machina_

"_A leader must have the courage to act against an expert's advice."_

[[SP/NH, DATE UNKNOWN/ TIME

UNKNOWN-- DATA CORRUPTED

_It's like a bad story that repeats itself over and over againâ€|
_Thought Poles, his arms folded as he listened to the pilot. They were in the rear of the Pelican; they found out that Bravo Company had survived the drop, the only good news all day. They had received no news from the men and women from the remnants of Alpha Company. A stab through his heart.

He didn't show the emotion, he just sat next to Harding, Jennifer Young (who had been next to him through the whole ordeal of the skirmish and the Pelican), and Benjamin who had surprised them by magically appearing out of nowhere. Not a surprise since this day was full of them.

The pilot went through the attack in space, the evacuation of the crew and the Captain's heroic sacrifice. He had explained while he wasn't there, he heard the shouts over the COM and the cries for help as life pods were ripped to shreds. He didn't know if anyone else survived but they weren't carbonized bone so he suggested that the Captain ordered all nonessential crew to the pods and abandon ship while bridge crew went toe-to-toe with a Covenant ship.

He had finished stating that sentence when Harding piped in. "What if the Covenant want something, that's why they haven't glassed the planet yet."

"The Covenant wanting something is funny as hell." The pilot said. "The only they want is to see humanity saying their final prayers before they either burn you, stab you or stomp your head in."

"But think about it. Considering the fact that we're all still alive tells you something."

"Tells us what?" Poles spoke, sharply standing, a pair of angry eyes peering at his friend. "Look, we have a Pelican, I say we EVAC now before it's too late."

Nicholas countered. "And what, let the Covenant get what they're looking for that most likely will cost us more lives in the end?"

"If you want to cause the death of hundreds of others that's your problem, Nick, but I will not go down in hell as someone who watched you."

Before Harding could reply, Jennifer held up her hands and stood between the two before fists were thrown. "Enough." Her eyes looked at Shane Poles. "Look, Nick is right, the Covenant came here for something, we don't know what but they're here and they set up a perimeter around the Museum for a reason." Her eyes were kinder to him, and Poles exhaled, brown eyes glanced at the ground and he just nodded.

"But," She flipped to Harding, lowered her arms and approached him, she jabbed a finger at him. "We're not going on some wild goose chase with the only Pelican that we know ofâ€| Our only way out of here."

Nicholas Harding said nothing.

"We're going with Pole's plan, right Ben?"

The retired Colonel looked at the two marines, when he was back in the UNSC he would out rank them both, and would be giving them orders but nowâ€¦ In the chain of events the way the rankings preceded he would be under their command. But for the simple fact he would have to choose who he was going withâ€¦ Harding who seemed reliable, and knew what he was talking about. Or Poles, "Hellhound", a man who had treated the civilians, rallied his troops and saved the civilians from certain death.

Benjamin cocked his head to the side, nodded. "Well, we're going with Poles. My job is to protect the people of this city, and not to chase after a theory."

Nicholas stood awestruck, he was out voted, and he knew he was right. _But they just wanted to live to see another dayâ€¦ understandable butâ€¦ Jesusâ€¦ I can't just let the Covenantâ€¦ _

"Good." Poles said. He turned toward the pilot. "How many can you cram in here at a time?"

"I would say about ten to fifteen but if you want to make people stand, I would say around twenty-five, give or take."

He turned to Jennifer. "Where's the nearest town?"

"About fifty kilometers North of here," She was about to continue, but she was interrupted.

"That's about a couple dozen trips back and forth. That's good enough; we'll EVAC the civilians and then the militia then the marines. Nicholas will-"

He looked at the spot where Nick was sitting, right by the edge of the Pelican bay but the seat was empty.

[[RESET MISSION CLOCK// **UPDATE NICHOLAS HARDING- 0100**
> HOURS/ 22-AUGUST-2549**

_A damned god send comes falling out of the damn sky; they think I'm finishedâ€¦ _Nicholas was half way through the camp, walking on the edge, not looking at anyone or anything that might draw attention. There was most likely a weapons cache here, and after he re-supplied he would then get a Warthog and get to his destination.

Not complicated and no one would know. Sure, maybe his actions were out of character for the moment, he had his reasons. As far as he concerned, the Covenant just invaded a planet but Poles told him â€œand Harding knew- t hat the Covenant don't take a world unless there is something of importance there.

Strange as it was. It was true. What the covenant would want on a human held a world was something that only the boys and girls at ONI knew.

He came upon the armory just a few meters ahead, outside were two

militia men armed with, he still couldn't believe it, M1 Garands. He shook his head, if he lived through this he would have to talk to someone about supplying the militias of outlying worlds with some decent weaponry.

Nicholas approached, his feet crunching on the rubble that littered the ground, his MA5B slung over his shoulder, the two men when seeing him coming stiffened and saluted. Harding returned the salute and smiled. "The Colonel would like to see you boys, a briefing is going on."

The taller of the two men spoke. "Why didn't he give us orders on the radio, and with the influx of marines in this camp, why in the hell would he send you? Harding?"

He froze slightly. The two men approached him, their weapons unslung pointing at him. "We got the message on the radio; we're going to take you back."

Looks like ammo is out of the questionâ€¦ He thought, and turned to bolt, he was half a block away from the nearest intersection and then he would head west, like what Ms. Young said toward the heaviest Covenant concentration, even with only a minimum ammo in his pouches he could make it.

His feet pushed against the ground, his brain forcing his eyes into a tunnel vision toward his target. The Corporal saw nothing black on the edges of his eyes, but he heard them, the shouts and yells for him to halt. He saw even a hand or two reach for him but they all missed by mere inches.

Ten meters away. The hard part, he knew the intersection would hold the most soldiers so he had to be quick, to make sure no one would even think about touching him. And they didn't anyway, when he came to that intersection he rounded the bend at maximum speed and found himself on a deserted patch of road but he couldn't stop running, they had a check point somewhere up ahead and he needed to get there.

He tried to listen to his headset and heard the sound of a few words that he didn't want to hear.

"_Shoot to kill. I repeatâ€¦ Shoot to kill."_

Oliver was militia man, he saw the Covenant descend into his city, murder civilians, killed his friends and family and he tried his best to see it didn't happen to anyone else. But now, he could not bear to think that he would have to kill a fellow man. Could he do it? He didn't know, and it seemed like god wanted to test him by making an AWOL soldier come in his direction and place him in his sights.

The S2AM Sniper rifle grew heavy, and his breathing slowed. He was alone on the building, no friend to tell him what to do. The sniper exhaled slowly, inhaled sharply. Palms wet, mouth like a desert. His left eye closed while his right remained open, he took the running marines in his sight.

He finger flicked the safety, the butt of the rifle pressed against the shoulder bone. Oliver saw the man's auburn hair from under the helmet and began to press down on the trigger. _Could he kill the

man? He'd find out in the next few seconds._

The crack of the sniper rifle was loud, and he tripped as if it was a god send, the fin stabilizing sabot round missed his head by millimeters, and he saw the thin trail it left behind. There was a sniper at a high angle, most likely a building and trying to take him out.

Cowboy turned to his right and into an alley, the smell was horrific, and he didn't know what was causing it but he didn't want to know. He didn't dare poke his head out again, he needed to get to that checkpoint and get that warthog. He unslung his MA5B and slowly moved to the corner of the building, he would press himself against the building and move fast, he would not give the sniper another shot at him.

He would count to three and make a break for itâ€|

Oneâ€|

Twoâ€|. _Fuck it_.

He ran, pushed himself off the brick wall of the residence and bolted, adrenaline fueling him. He swore he felt the wind of grazing round come near him, preparing to strike him down. It never came.

He reached the checkpoint unharmed, except for a bruise on his knee but that could be ignored with ease.

Nicholas saw the checkpoint ahead and no one was there. Strangeâ€| It was completely empty save for the warthog. He pressed the AR against his shoulder and moved forward, his eyes scanning, and his feet quietly gliding there was nothing. He reached the 'hog, and checked it out, there were spent shell casing all around it but a single soul to speak of.

He frowned, and moved into the driver's side and keyed the ignition, the vehicle rumbled to life. He glanced over his shoulder, saw nothing and stepped on the gas, the wheels spun for a split second before taking him off down the road.

He didn't see the camouflage elite watching him, nor didn't he see that it was leading a team of twenty towards the camp.

As far as Nicholas "Cowboy" Harding knew, they didn't exist.

But for the men and women at the camp, they'll are all _too_ real.

8. PART EIGHT: A God's War

****PART EIGHT****: A God's War

"_A leader is a dealer in hope."_

"_Hope? Oh yes, there is hope - infinite hope. But none for us.___"_

"_It is fun to do the impossible."_

"_Death comes easy in the old war, remember? The fight against the other humans, the people who were different, richer or maybe even darker or lighterâ€¦ Those were the good old days." Harding looked at Poles who was speaking quietly, his eyes looking out over the void, white stars glittering the background, a small blue and green planet looming in the distance. _

That planet was once thought to be one of a kind.

Harding gives a stiff laugh, his eyes looking his friend â€"his brother, over, "Why do you say that? People still died in those wars."

_Poles didn't look at him, his eyes focus intently on the bluish green world, his home world, his people's home world. The safest place in the galaxy. _

"_Because in the endâ€¦ At least you know that humanity wouldn't destroy itself, in the end, we could rebuildâ€¦ We could see the light in the darkness. The beacon at the end of the tunnel. The voice calling you home when you're lost." Shane's face creases into a frown._

_Harding shakes his head. "So, _Philosopher_, what do you see when you look into the darkness."_

"_I see that it's never ending, no beacon of light and no voice to call us home."_

[0300 HOURS// 22-AUGUST-2549

JERICO IV- CPL. HARDING-

210**TH**** PARA-INFANTRY BAT.**

Harding felt his eyes sting but he continued to drive forward, rubbing them away, seeing the hundreds of bodies of civilians around him, he wondered what happened to his Battalion, his friendsâ€¦ Nicholas turned the vehicle, he saw nothing ahead, and he had met almost zero resistance as he continued on.

Something isn't right.

He slowed the vehicle to a crawl, its tracks trying to grip the loose rubble but instead skids to a halt. He muttered a swear. Silently he hopped out of the vehicle and sees something he relieved to see after almost a tense thirty minutes of driving.

The museum, half of the building was blown to hell but it was perfect none the less. Its majestic marble pillars stood thirty meters tall, the long elegant stairs still guided up the heavily guarded door into the building.

Elitesâ€¦ A lot of them, and they seemed _pissed_.

From what Harding could see the creatures were speaking to each other rapidly, their arms flailing wildly and jabbing its finger at its comrade. The comrade looked at the dozen grunts standing around the entrance, pointed in a direction towards something Harding couldn't

see and they ambled off, the blue armored bastard going with them.

The crimson armored elite looked around before entering the museum.

It looks like the front door is out of the question.

And if he knew anything about instinctsâ€¦ The back door would be just as bad. He scanned the area, his MA5B in his grasp as he smiles as he looks at the side of the building. The small alley way between the museum and the building next to it, remembering a saying Poles told him not to long ago.

When you at the bottom, the only place to go is up.

_Why the hell did you have to run away like that, Nick? Damn you know I would've come with you. _The thought sped through his head like a bolt of lightning, yet he could not do a damn thing about it. Nick and he watched each other's back; when the 210th started they were saving each other's asses since the first battleâ€¦ Nowâ€¦ If anything happenedâ€¦ He couldn't help.

Damn, and after meeting Harding's familyâ€¦ Promising his sister to take care of her older brother, going back and telling her that he was goneâ€¦ It would tear _his _heart out and pry out _her _soul.

Sitting down on a crate, his elbows pressed against his knees and his hands on the butt of the rifle and his hands rested on top of them.

He heard boots crunching and someone sit on the case next to him. That caused him to stir and glance up, seeing the familiar face of Jennifer Young who took a seat next to him. She looks at him. "Not going to get any sleep soldier boy?"

Poles smiled, "You know there's an old saying about thatâ€¦"

"And that is?"

His smiled shortened. "You can sleep when you're dead."

She didn't pursue the subject any further; instead Young looked at the small camp, the marines who now occupied it. The silence and the peace. She prepared to speak but she grew decided against it and glanced at the marine who spoke in a monotone voice. "How long ago did the Covenant begin their invasion?"

"Three days agoâ€¦ I thinkâ€¦" She paused. "First they came in eliminated all responses to combat including the small company of marines who pulled outâ€¦"

"They left?"

"Of courseâ€¦ They deemed the city strategically inadequate for retaking the planet thus they left us behind."

Poles shook his head silently, a scowl creasing his lips. The marine looked at the sky, still pitch black and wondered if dawn would ever

comeâ€¦| As well as help.

Harding decided against the good old frontal assault, he had neither the squad nor the firepower to back him up. Now if he had a scorpion tank and a partner to drive, he would take the odds of there most likely being a whole company of covenant troops inside and through it out the window.

So he took the much more stealthy approach, he would go in through the roof door, the building was a good fifteen stories, a mighty big museum and thus his only chance to get to the roof â€"because of the buildings next to it were only five or so stories high- was the ability to go use the fire escape routes that were located on the outside.

It would be a long climb up but most likely they wouldn't expect one human _to go SPARTAN on their asses._

With the MA5B slung over his shoulder, he checked it out, checked his pouches making sure he had plenty of ammo and pressed his back against the wall. The alley was only across the street but he wondered if they had Jackals stationed on the roof tops. If they did, he was most likely screwed. But he had to chance and make sure he didn't slip on any of the rubble.

Harding looked at the ten foot wide space and ran for it, his feet pressing against the ground, he swore he heard the sound of a beam rifle's whisper over his shoulder, he swore he could swear that half way mark he felt something tear into his shoulder but it was of course nothing.

He skidded to a halt, the darkness engulfing him and silence. He made it.

Nicholas looked up.

A genuine new pain the ass.

_Boom. _The explosion rocked the base, something happenedâ€¦| At the makeshift armory, he didn't need it spelled out for him. Poles hit the dirt hard, pulling Young down with him, the blazing heat of plasma sizzled over his right shoulder and he winced, when he looked at Jennifer she seemed fined, scared, but fine.

He looked over the crate and saw nothing but he saw the blue strobes of light igniting at a point and sailing above him. When he finally found out what it was aiming it, it was a marine who had turned to run but took three hits to his back armor. It boiled quickly, burning through the many layers of armor.

The man fell, his screams of pain echoing in Poles' mind.

He didn't speak, it was one fluid movement which only a few could attempt and actually be successful.

Hellhound rolled onto his back, the rifles butt pressed against his arm as he squeezed the trigger at his hidden foe. The first trio of rounds missed, but the second three hit on target. The rounds tore through the eight foot tall bastard with ease, the beast gave a roar, materializing out of thin air and fell to the ground.

Shane picked himself up off the ground, and ran to the creature grabbing its plasma rifle and tossed it at Young who was still on the ground in a sitting position. She caught it.

"We've got company. Find that Pelican pilot; tell him to get his bird off the ground now. And get as many civilians on it as you can."

She didn't move.

He knelt by her. "Don't freeze up on me now. We're almost out of this mess, so just do what I asked, fire at any shimmer that moves and get on that Pelican." Hellhound gave a grim frown. "You're gonna live through this. I promise you that."

Her head shook rapidly.

"Good." He helped her up.

It pierced through his arm, the blade. Cut through his muscles in a horizontal fashion. The pain, before it was pulled out he crumpled like a rock, Young fired her weapon. The world spun to him, everything seemed like a blur. He heard the beast fall, but before he could do anything, say a word, darkness overcame him and nothing.

The roof wasn't that hard to get to; just a quick climb up what was basically stair case. The only problem was getting his timing perfect, there were jackals at each window, and every couple of seconds they would glance over their shoulder giving Nicholas enough time to slip by.

He checked his MA5B before slipping onto the roof, there was a single jackal, its eyes focused intently in the direction in which Harding had come. The creature paid him no mind, Nicholas wondered if the small monster even smelled his scent.

The Corporal slung his rifle over his shoulder, and withdrew the serrated edged combat knife. He moved silently, making his way to the back of the Jackalâ€| His eyes narrowed the world around him faded away.

It was a fluid motion, the hand clamping the powerful jaws of creature shut and the sharp blade embedding itself into its throat, and it struggled but unable to scream. It slumped silently to the ground, no movement.

Coated in sweat, Nicholas polished its plasma pistol and tucked the arm shield into his rucksack before moving across the rooftop to the single door that occupied the void.

He rechecked his weapon, whispered an uncommon prayer before moving towards it. Trying to keep as low as possible, he reached out of the knob and slowly opened it.

Pulling it open and slipped inside, blackness gripping him.

His mouth spoke an all too common phrase.

"Into the abyssâ€|"

Young saw the elite fall, its body hitting the ground with a dull thump oozing purple blood as the militia woman reloaded and saw the chaos around her. There was a hundred miniature fights everywhere, marines and aliens clashed in almost what could be called hand to hand combat.

She looked down, Poles was there, unconscious, what was she suppose to do?

Then she remembered. She reached down and ripped the helmet from Shane's head and placed it on hers. She spoke rapidly into the mike. "This is Jennifer Young, Rally Point Bravo has been compromised, all remaining civilians, get to the Pelicans now. Marines you will hold off the Covenant as long as you can."

There were many ad hoc replies but all of them confirmed the order.

Young then stripped off the overly large helmet and tossed it to the side. She knelt next to Poles, no blood but the wound was burned.

Black.

"Jesusâ€¦" She murmured.

With the world around her going to hell, she looked down at the soldier who had been with them through the whole ordeal, his eyes closed and shallow breathing from his lips. Her eyes looked around, chaosâ€¦ still total chaos. And she was there alone, the war blazing around her and the dying marine cradled in her arms.

Nicholas moved fast, the MA5B sweeping the hallway, nothing, just silence. He expected something, a threat, an attack, something of the sort but there was nothing but an eerie silence and his quiet inhales and exhales.

The corporal was on the second floor of the museum, looking straight at the suspended bodies of killer whales that seemed to dance in death.

No signs of the Covenant. Looking at the green linoleum floors he quietly made his way into the shadows, following the wall towards a spiral staircase that descended into the lobby.

His feet made no sound as he descended finally reaching the ground floor, the whole floor was lit in white light, illuminating where shadows should've been. He was only protected by the shadow of the staircase above his head, as he scanned the ground floor. The first elite was to his right by the door, barking at a grunt in which was cowering in fear.

Continuing to scan while watching the pair from the corner of his eye, he saw a ground of elites by the museum food court surrounding a cluster of purple boxes and some wooden crates.

A shadow moved at the corner of his eye, and he saw another pair of blue armored elites cross mere meters away, they didn't notice the crouching marine and moved toward the small station by the food

court.

He then began to notice that the place had been literally cleaned out; most of the exhibits were taken all except the fossils. He saw that to his right, in another wing of museum marked 'Minerals of the Galaxy' there was almost nothing in it, all the rocks were completely stripped from their displays and gone.

_The alien freaks are interested in a rock. _

He could almost grin at that.

But no smile came.

Checking his rifle again and looking at the bandoleer of grenades he failed to see himself winning in this fight. He couldn't retreat now, ascending back up the stairs he would be nailed by the Covenant. And he couldn't do a mad dash across the brightly lit floor so he had one option.

Take the bastards out before they saw it coming.

Harding stripped off three grenades, and looked at the terminal, pulled the pins and hurled them both. The spheres floated through the air, one bounced right toward them the other detonated in air. Ripping two of the elites to shreds and wounded the others, the grunt and elite by the entrance spun toward chaos and were each hit by a barrage of bullets from one human.

Just one human being who was charging across the open ground firing at them.

Eyes full of hate.

The grunt went down fast, its chest pick pocketed with gouges. The elite felt its shields flicker then die, before the rounds tore through its chest sending it tumbling to the ground.

Nicholas spun instantly, and saw one elite being to lift itself to its feet. It went down with a sustained burst, and its partner who was trying to crawl away suffered the same fate.

The room was quiet again, and he knew it wouldn't stay that way. With ten bounding steps he was at the terminal, there was a lot of Covenant script running down the screen, but nothing that resembled a simple picture. Something anything he could understand.

He frowned, and looked around the food court, the wooden crates were empty but something caught his eye to his right. It was a metallic red case, a dark emerald stone illuminated from it. It was the twelve inches long and five inches wide and it held the angular gem with sharp prods, keeping it in place.

Harding snatched it up and shouldered his MA5B; it looked like the Covenant had almost gotten what they wanted.

"Bingo..." He whispered. Nick began to turn around and heard the voice that sent a chill down his spine.

"_Wort. Wort. Wort." _

End
file.